

STILTSVILLE COMMITTEE REPORT

prepared for

**THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM
ADVISORY BOARD**

May 17, 2001
Biscayne National Park
Miami, Florida

INTRODUCTION

As directed by the National Park System Advisory Board, the Stiltsville Committee was established to identify and recommend appropriate future public uses of Stiltsville, and to develop and recommend decision trees to guide the future operation of the seven stilt campsites in Biscayne National Park in Southeast Florida. Advisory Board member, Marie Ridder was selected by Chairman John Hope Franklin to head the Stiltsville Committee. Elected officials, the legal representatives of the private leaseholders, the National Park Service, and Ms. Ridder nominated individuals from the community to be appointed by Chairman Franklin. All nominations received were appointed to the Stiltsville Committee and include the following 21 local citizens (nominating sources included):

Mr. Gail Baldwin
Coconut Grove, FL
(Nominated by Rep. Ros-Lehtinen)

Miami resident since the 1950s, whose life centers around boating activities and Biscayne Bay. Well established Architect and activist. He holds interest in one of the Stiltsville leases.

Dr. Otis Brown
Key Biscayne, FL
(Nominated by Senator Graham)

Dr. Otis Brown is the Dean of the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, University of Miami; and a professor in the Division of Meteorology and Physical Oceanography.

Mr. Greg Bush
Miami, FL
(Nominated by
Acting NPS Director Galvin)

President of the Urban Environment League. Mr. Bush also heads the Institute of Public History at the University of Miami.

Mr. Thomas J. Caldwell
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Mr. Jones,esq.)

Grew up in Miami and has been an interest holder in various Stiltsville leases over the years. He is currently a member of the Miami Springs Power Boat Club and one of the Club's counsels in the pending Stiltsville litigation.

Ms. Elena Carpenter
Coconut Grove, FL
(Nominated by Mayor Penelas)

Publisher of several local newspapers in Miami. Active in numerous social and civic organizations.

Mr. Don Chinquina
Miami, FL 33143
(Nominated by Rep. Deutsch)

Executive Director of a prominent local environmental organization concerned with protecting Biscayne National Park.

The Honorable Patricia Derian
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Ms. Ridder)

Former Assistant Secretary for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Mr. Bernard Janis
Coral Gables, FL
(Nominated by Rep. Deutsch)

Bank Chairman and former real estate developer. Former Stiltsville lessee with extensive knowledge of the structures.

Mr. Rob Killgore
Key Biscayne, FL
(Nominated by
Acting NPS Director Galvin)

Longtime Miami resident with extensive knowledge of the park's marine resources as an avid flats fisherman. Sales Representative for Florida Sportsman Magazine.

Mr. James LeShaw
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Mayor Penelas)

Lives in Key Biscayne and is a partner at Greenberg Traurig. He holds co-interest in a Stiltsville lease.

Mr. Duffield Matson, III
Coral Gables, FL
(Nominated by Mr. Tuttle, II)

Third generation Miamian involved in various business and civic organizations. An insurance agent specializing in surety issues. He holds an interest in a Stiltsville lease.

Mr. David Miller
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Senator Graham)

Captain U.S. Coast Guard (Retired). Managing Director of the Miami River Commission with technical and operational expertise in commercial vessel operation, marine safety issues and pollution prevention requirements/regulations.

Mr. Harold Moorefield
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Rep. Ros-Lehtinen)

A 5th generation Floridian who has practiced commercial bankruptcy law in Miami for the past 23 years. He is an avid boater who lives aboard his trawler moored in Coconut Grove on Biscayne Bay.

Ms. Arva Moore Parks
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Senator Graham)

Ms. Parks is a local community leader, as well as, an acclaimed historian and preservationist. She currently is Chairperson of the Viscaya Trust.

Ms. Audrey Peterman
Fort Lauderdale, FL
(Nominated by
Acting NPS Director Galvin)

President and co-founder of Earthwise Productions, Inc. dedicated to environmental awareness and Environmental Justice. Active in numerous civic organizations.

Laura Roberts
Coral Gables, FL
(Nominated by Governor Bush)

Third generation Miamian, retired attorney, mother of four, active in various civic organizations. She is an interest holder in a Stiltsville lease.

Paul Schwiep, Esq.
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Rep. Deutsch)

Long time Miami resident of Cuban ancestry with extensive experience in land use litigation and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.

Pat Sessions
Coconut Grove, FL
(Nominated by Governor Bush)

Long time Miami resident, developer and general contractor. Active in various civic organizations, including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. He is an interest holder in a Stiltsville lease.

Ronald Shuffield
Coral Gables, FL
(Nominated by Governor Bush)

President of one of the nation's largest full-service real estate firms. Involved in numerous civic and charitable organizations, including past chairman of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce.

William M. Tuttle, II
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Rep. Ros-Lehtinen)

Several generation Miamian active in various social and civic organizations. He is an interest holder in a Stiltsville lease and is one of the attorneys for the plaintiffs in the pending Stiltsville litigation.

Mr. John Underwood
Miami, FL
(Nominated by Mayor Penelas)

Miami native and former editor of the Miami Herald, a former senior writer for Sports Illustrated, and has authored several books. He remains active in social and civic organizations.

In an effort to understand the complex issues involved in recommending future public use of the seven stilt houses, the Committee met on March 19 for an orientation to Biscayne National Park and a site visit to Stiltsville. The Committee also met on March 20 and 21 and again on May 15. All meetings were open to the public and announced via a direct mailing to over 900 people, news stories and a letter to the Miami Herald Editor with an open invitation. An open house session was held in the evening of March 20 to encourage public participation and comment as to appropriate public uses of the Stiltsville structures. An e-mail address was created to accept electronic comments and the park accepted faxed comments on behalf of the Committee.

BACKGROUND

Stiltsville has a colorful history that dates back to the 1930s, when the first "campsite" was constructed on stilts above the water. Over the years more buildings were constructed. At its peak in 1960, there were 27 structures on the bay flats, but hurricanes,

fires and the ravages of being in such an exposed environment reduced the community of campsites over time.

In 1984, the bottomland on which the stilt structures sit was deeded by the State of Florida to the Federal Government as part of the expansion of Biscayne National Park ([figure 1](#)). The National Park Service inherited the 14 remaining state leases that had an expiration date of July 1999. The lease agreements called for the occupants to vacate and remove all structures from the bay waters upon expiration of the leases. Hurricane Andrew in 1992 destroyed seven of the structures leaving the existing seven campsites ([figures 2](#) and 3). [DUE TO LARGE FILE SIZE, WEB VERSION DOES NOT CONTAIN FIGURE 3]

As the July 1999 lease expiration neared the leaseholders were encouraged by Superintendent Dick Frost to seek national historic register designation for Stiltsville. Various organizations expressed support of listing “Stiltsville” on the National Register of Historic Places, including Dade Heritage Trust, Florida Historical Resources Division, and the Miami City Commission. Although there was unanimous support from the Florida Historical Resources Division for the nomination, the Keeper of the National Register determined Stiltsville was not eligible for listing in a letter dated March 18, 1999.

The first of several legal “Standstill Agreements” between the Federal government and the leaseholders was entered into prior to the July 1999 expiration. On July 2, 1999 the National Park Service received a second National Register nomination from the State Historic Preservation Officer based on “traditional cultural property.” The Keeper of the Register concluded in a letter dated October 22, 1999 that Stiltsville was not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

The leaseholders and friends of Stiltsville formed a group called Save Old Stiltsville (SOS) to capture and promote the public support for the preservation of Stiltsville. A petition was signed by over 75,000 citizens in support of Stiltsville and in opposition to a requirement in the lease that the campsites be demolished when the leases expired.

In August 2000, Superintendent Linda Canazaneli publicly announced the National Park Service plan to retain the Stiltsville campsites for public use and enjoyment. The NPS decision to repair and use the campsites for public purposes acknowledged Stiltsville as an asset to the local community and to park visitors, recognized the extensive public interest locally and nationally, and responded to the high level of active involvement by elected officials interested in the future of Stiltsville.

In order to allow public input, in compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the National Park System Advisory Board created the Stiltsville Committee in January 2001. Chairman Franklin designated board member, Marie Ridder as the Committee Chair and appointed 21 local citizens as committee members. Chairman Franklin directed the Stiltsville Committee to identify and recommend future public uses of Stiltsville, and to develop and recommend decision trees to guide the future operation of the structures.

The current standstill agreement ends on April 1, 2002. This allows time for the NPS to develop the Stiltsville Management Plan, National Environmental Policy Act documents, and engineering and construction plans needed to begin to provide public access.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS (Adopted May 15, 2001)

The Stiltsville Committee has reviewed input from the National Park Service, the members of the Stiltsville Committee and comments and suggestions from the public. It is agreed that the existence of the Stiltsville structures and the surrounding aquatic environment is a critical area and important to the citizens of South Florida and all visitors to the Biscayne National Park.

Based on this understanding, the committee has come to the following recommendations:

If and when management of the Stiltsville Structures are brought under the control of the National Park Service, that the National Park Service should strongly consider the following:

Consensus Items (Vote: all in favor)

- A. That the use of the individual structures could, by the nature of their physical attributes, be varied both in use and access which would be determined by public need and structural and financial feasibility, after further information is made available to the National Park Service and or the committee, and further discussion is had.
- B. That Stiltsville should serve as a location for public awareness of the natural and cultural features of the northern portion of the park. The advisory committee recommends the National Park Service establish a landside northern visitor center for awareness of the park and could provide a terminus for accessing the northern reaches of the park.
- C. That any use of the Stiltsville structures shall not materially damage the bay ecosystem, and that all programs or uses proposed include specific plans to safeguard the environment.
- D. That it is the goal of this committee to provide a maximum amount of public access balanced with proper management practices to insure the maximum preservation and utilization of the structures. The use of non-profit groups, civic organizations should be emphasized to generate awareness and utilization of the structures.
- E. That a public information policy be incorporated in the Stiltsville Plan to provide heightened awareness of the uses that Stiltsville offers. Additionally non-invasive programs such as boat tours and wayside signs be used to increase public

- participation, education and awareness of Stiltsville and the northern end of the park.
- F. That a wide variety of uses, including but not limited to, scientific, artistic, historic, recreational, educational, and civic uses be considered, to encourage public use of the structures.
- G. That the committee has identified certain uses that follow as potentially beneficial to the public. The committee recommends continued study of the feasibility of these uses on a structural, management, and financial basis for these intended uses. These uses will include but are not limited to:
1. Interpretive/Media Center
 2. Artist in residence and other artistic uses
 3. Scientific research
 4. Historic Interpretation, and Preservation
 5. Ecological Education
 6. Meeting/Civic Spaces
 7. Ranger Station
 8. Recreation
 9. Campsites
 10. Education
- H. That a Biscayne National Park specific “FACA” (Federal Advisory Committee Act) or other public advisory committee mechanism be established to facilitate consensus public input for the Biscayne National Park.
- I. Given the unbiased leadership, professionalism of Marie Ridder and our collective desire to maintain the continuity and effectiveness of this committee we hereby respectfully recommend and request of the Honorable Secretary of the Interior the reappointment of Ms. Ridder to the National Park System Advisory Board and the chairmanship of this committee.
- J. In order that greater public use and enjoyment of Biscayne Bay be expanded, this committee recommends that a racially and culturally diverse multi-agency planning group be established to examine the feasibility of facilitating/creating a limited series of land based public facilities and a water transportation system in the area of Miami, Key Biscayne and Stiltsville.
- K. If and when the structures come under the control of the National Park Service, the committee agrees:
- there are a variety of uses for the Stiltsville structures.

- there are a variety of management options available. These options need to be studied further. One management scheme will be chosen in the future by the National Park Service.
- that non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and youth groups have access to the structures, and that people have opportunities to recreate and be educated on Biscayne Bay.

Majority Items (one or more “no” votes)

- L. That the current Stiltsville structures be recognized to be an integral part of the history of South Florida and constitute a “landmark” of Biscayne Bay and should be preserved.

Vote: one “no” vote

- M. This advisory committee recommends to the National Park Service that in light of the historic and landmark value of the remaining Stiltsville homes, the 50% rule be waived regardless of management/ownership.

Vote: one “no” at the March meeting.

Vote: two “no” votes at May meeting

- N. That the costs of rehabilitation, maintenance, and staff should have the goal of financial self-sufficiency. These funds should be from a combination of National Park Service, public and private funds, which may be raised through a variety of forums.

Vote: two “no” votes

- O. That all structures be considered for use of “green energy” ie, solar/wind power based on the type of use contemplated.

Vote: five “no”; fourteen “yes”; three not present for vote

- P. The Stiltsville Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board extend the term and the racial and cultural diversity of this committee to work with and advise NPS during the production of the Stiltsville Management Plan.

Vote: two “no” votes

This report is prepared for the National Park System Advisory Board and completes the work of the Stiltsville Committee at this time.